

RIO+20: THE ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

This paper aims to encourage and support the participation of civil society at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development – Rio+20 and the many processes around it.

We seek to provide a synthetic and objective view of the event, the issues at hand and the means of participation, as well as of many of the activities related to the conference that are being developed, from the perspective of a non-governmental organization committed to sustainability, justice, democracy and citizenship in its broadest sense. Other authors and organizations possibly have different views, but we are confident that we offer a good starting point here, for all those who are interested in Rio+20, irrespective of their positions and backgrounds. Comments and suggestions for improvement are welcome and can be sent to comunicacao@vitaecivilis.org.br

Enjoy your reading!

The information presented here is from 15/01/2012. Please visit www.vitaecivilis.org.br for an updated and more detailed edition.

UNDERSTANDING RIO+20

What is Rio+20?

Between June 20 and 22 2012 the city of Rio de Janeiro will host the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD). The realization of the conference is motivating the organization of a series of events and discussion processes in Brazil and around the world, culminating in a variety of activities in the period before the conference. The focus will be the city of Rio de Janeiro, between June 11 and 24, but many related activities will also take place in other places and dates.

“Rio+20” is the nickname given to both the UN conference itself, as the set of events and activities related to it, either linked or not to the official process. In this document, whenever the term “Rio 20” is mentioned, we will try to make it clear whether we refer specifically to the conference or the wide range of events and activities.

A week before the official conference, between June 13 and 15, Rio de Janeiro will also host the 3rd meeting of its Preparatory Committee (PrepCom), which will already gather many diplomats and representatives of governments and civil society.

Rio+20 simplified calendar													
2 ^a	3 ^a	4 ^a	5 ^a	6 ^a	SAB.	DOM.	2 ^a	3 ^a	4 ^a	5 ^a	6 ^a	SAB.	DOM.
11/6	12/6	13/6	14/6	15/6	16/6	17/6	18/6	19/6	20/6	21/6	22/6	23/6	24/6
Pre-event		PrepCom3 (UN)			Informal negotiations Varied events				UNCSD-2012 (UN)			Balance and next steps	
People's Summit for Social and Environmental Justice													
Other unofficial Rio+20-related events (to be identified)													

Rio+20 will be a massive event, and the Brazilian government has declared the ambition to make it the largest conference ever held by the UN. More than one hundred heads of state or government are expected to attend the conference.

In the days between the PrepCom and the Rio+20 conference, June 16 to 19, there should be a space for dialogue involving both civil society and government representatives, promoted by the Brazilian government in contact with the UN. The expectation, as announced by the Brazilian government and the UN secretariat for Rio+20, is that this will be an important and open space for dialog with an innovative format. Details on the organization and possible participation ways in these activities are still to be defined. A draft proposal of issues to be discussed was published by the Brazilian government in December 2011 and includes: food security and poverty eradication; energy security; sustainable development economics/ sustainable production and consumption; technological innovation for sustainability; cities; water; oceans and decent work/ migration. Biodiversity, climate change and desertification may appear as crosscutting issues, but won't have specific sessions.

During Rio+20 there will also be numerous parallel events organized by the civil society and other public and private organizations, within and outside the official programme. Among these, we emphasize the People's Summit: a major meeting organized by large networks of NGOs and social movements in Brazil and the world (more information is presented below).

What are the Rio+20 objectives?

The Rio+20 conference is guided by the UN GA resolution 64/236 from 2009/12/24 (available at <http://bit.ly/rio20garesolution>), which set the following goals: i) ensure a renewed political commitment to sustainable development, ii) assess the progress made to date and the gaps that still exist in implementing the outcomes of key meetings on sustainable development and iii) address new and emerging challenges.

Faced with the goals set by the official agenda of the UN, other civil society players are mobilizing to influence the outcome of the official conference and the public opinion, so that their own goals, causes, and points of view are also considered. Evidently, the discussions within the UN and governments relate to key issues for society, such as social justice, human rights, the creation and distribution of wealth and income, the use and governance of the common goods, access to information and technology and its use, democratic participation and cities, among others.

Rio+20 – as a whole – can be regarded as to promote a broad debate on the state of the world and the current directions of our civilization, seeking to articulate the goals of different social players, and agree, as much as possible, on guidelines to give effect to the common goal of moving forward - effectively and urgently - in building a socially fair, economically prosperous and environmentally sustainable society. But we also have to keep in mind that under this very general perspective there are many different approaches and instruments that must be considered, presenting different expectations with regard to the challenges of transforming patterns of production and consumption, the role of the economy and of the private world, the duties of States and public policies, and the role of civil society.

What are the topics under discussion?

According to the guidelines defined by the UN GA resolution 64/236 in 2009/12/24, Rio+20 will address two main issues:

1. *The transition to a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication*

The United Nations Environment Program sees the Green Economy (GE) as the one that results in improvement of human welfare and social equality while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcity. The three pillars of GE are: it is low-carbon, has efficient use of natural resources and is socially inclusive. It is a relatively new term, and one of the objectives of Rio+20 is to improve the understanding of it. For this reason, GE is always placed “in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication”, indicating that Rio+20 should seek to promote proposals and ways to accelerate the transition and assure that it quickly becomes a dominant economic model that meets such guidelines.


Importantly, the debate on the subject is intense. Some believe it is a valid strategy to place demands specifically related to sustainable development in daily economic practices. Others see in it a risk of expansion of the processes of commodification of nature and privatization of common goods (such as the sources of environmental services and the atmosphere), which would result in more concentration of wealth and power and greater social inequality. Some people question the need for a new term, and see it as an incentive to superficial, opportunistic or protectionist measures, serving business interests rather than the goals of sustainability. Finally, there is also controversy about conceptual issues, such as the lack of attention given to the need for social control over economic powers, the awareness of planetary limits, and the need for action on inequality and unsustainable patterns of production and consumption (which go beyond the eradication of poverty).

2. The institutional framework (governance tools) for sustainable development

At Rio+20, proposals for reform of global governance issues related to sustainable development will also be discussed. During the conference, the debate on governance should lead to conclusions and measures to enable the UN and countries to choose the means and tools to promote and accelerate the transition to sustainable societies, considering economic, social and environmental aspects, and interaction between them.

Both the environmental governance and global governance of sustainable development will be discussed:

- **Environmental governance:** the search for a new institutional set-up within the UN to promote synergistic and effective implementation of multilateral environmental agreements, and to guarantee a better coordination of activities between UN bodies and member countries. One likely result is the creation of a UN body aimed at the environmental issue, with more autonomy and relevance than the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), or the elevation of UNEP at that level, increasing its effectiveness.
- **Sustainable development global governance:** the objective is to insert the perspective of sustainable development in the core of UN decision-making, so that the subject (in its social, economic and environmental dimensions) is addressed as cross-cutting and integrated into national and international development strategies. A high-level council for sustainable development is likely to be established.



In addition to specific discussions within the UN and its bureaucratic organization, Rio+20 will have a broader dimension of the debate on global governance, closely related to economy. The background issue is the weakening of the public power (especially National States) in relation to transnational powers (such as corporations and financial capital) and global issues (such as climate change and assaults on oceans).

In recent decades, a reduction process of planning tools and the role of the State has been observed, with the transfer of key decisions “to the market”, regarding resource allocation and investment. Regardless of the benefits this policy may have brought in terms of boosting the economy, the fact is that the absence of social control mechanisms over economic agents left room to high-risk situations (i.e. the various crisis in progress) and abuse in exploitation of both nature and human beings.

The central challenge of Rio+20 is to find ways for the government (local, national and global) to be able to direct the power of economy, in accordance with democratically taken decisions, especially when it comes to using instruments related to the proposed Green Economy.

What are the expected results for Rio+20?

In its official process, Rio+20 will result in a short and focused, political document. That is, a text of about 20 pages, which strength lies in the commitment made by countries and in the completeness and consistency of the broad agenda laid by the objectives and themes of the conference. The conference process does not come down to technical details of implementation or justification, and is not designed to give a legally binding (mandatory for signatories countries) character to the document produced.

It is hoped that this political document reaffirms the commitment and principles already agreed in the various negotiations undertaken by the United Nations, related to sustainable development, and to present a roadmap for the transition to a new economic model that leads to a fairer, more prosperous and sustainable society, properly directed and controlled by an institutional framework (governance tools) compatible with the undertaken commitment and challenges.

Based on a public consultation process opened by the UN in 2011 and on preliminary talks, the first draft of the final document of the conference was presented and put under discussion in January 2012 (the draft is available at <http://bit.ly/rio20zerodraft>). From this first version, regular negotiation meetings will take place for members of the diplomatic bodies of the participating countries to discuss the proposed amendments on the text. The first one will be held in New York March 19 to 23 2012. The last round of negotiations before a final decision on Rio+20 will occur during the third meeting of Preparatory Committee (PrepCom), held from June 13 to 15 in Rio de Janeiro.

Although not having a legally binding character (i.e. decisions will have a political character, with no legal obligation as to compliance), the text can be agreed to bring strong commitment and clear recommendations related to protocols and conventions already in existence or to be developed, either by the UN or by member countries. In this sense, one can say that Rio+20 will set an agenda for the next year, which will strongly direct the activities related to sustainability across the globe. Indications of this are, for example, commitments (already mentioned in the draft under negotiation) related to Sustainable Development Goals and the negotiation processes, which have 2015 as reference date.

As noted, Rio+20 is not limited to the conference's official process, and civil society activities are of great importance both to influence the results of this official process, and to lead to advances that go far beyond the conference itself. Rio+20 should also result in a strengthening of the articulation of global civil society around large areas of convergence, identifying lines of action that can nourish and sustain a broad social mobilization. The great diversity of actors involved makes it impossible to state, at this point, what are these convergences. But it is possible to present how to participate in processes of NGOs and social movements related to Rio+20, as is shown below.

Will Rio+20 decide or have some influence over other ongoing negotiations, such as the Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol?

Although specific issues, such as climate change, are of enormous importance, the Rio+20 conference will address sustainable development as a whole, citing the main issues that have been negotiated, but without giving special attention or taking formal decisions on any of them. Thus, we cannot say that the conference will directly address issues of formal negotiations and other processes of the UN, just as the conventions already in progress.

However, although there is no direct interference, the final document of the conference can bring clear calls, recommendations, directions and commitments related to protocols and conventions already in existence or to be developed. In addition, informally or indirectly, there is great influence potential to the course of these processes - through bilateral or multilateral agreements, voluntary commitment of countries and other players, the establishment of alliances or pressure groups, the exchange of information or the impact of the public, media and social leaders' opinion.

PARTICIPATING IN RIO+20

How to participate in Rio+20?

Registration to participate in official activities of Rio+20 are open until May 20, 2012 for organizations that have consultative status with ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council of the UN) or were accredited to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 (WSSD2002), and can be made in <http://bit.ly/rio20inscricao>.

Organizations that are not yet accredited to the United Nations and wish to participate will have a single opportunity for accreditation until February 20, and accreditation can be done in <http://bit.ly/rio20credenciamento>.

Media professionals interested in covering the event can find more information at <http://bit.ly/rio20media>.

General information about the registration and accreditation processes can be found at <http://bit.ly/rio20participacao>. Individuals who are not registered by an organization accredited to the UN or by the official delegation of their countries will not be allowed to participate in the activities of the official conference proceedings.

Besides the possibility of being present at the conference, the UN and the Brazilian government have declared an intention to provide communication channels on the Internet, capable of transmitting events in Rio de Janeiro and also welcome participation in the interactive process. Similar intentions have been presented by some civil society organizations, but there's nothing defined yet. The online version of this publication at www.vitaecivilis.org.br will bring more information and updated links.

A platform for remote indirect participation in the conference, open to all interested parties, was established with UN support and is available in <http://www.futurewewant.org/>. In this portal, the public is invited to present and share their visions and expectations for the future in the form of text, photos, videos, drawings etc. The promise is that the material received will be compiled and used in the assembly of a space at Rio+20, and then will continue to be used in the formulation and sharing of online collective proposals. The UN itself has also opened a channel for civil society consultation, available at www.un.org/sustainablefuture.

Importantly, the Rio+20 process goes far beyond the official process, and the activities organized by civil society are of great importance both to influence the results of the official process, and to lead to advances that go far beyond the conference itself. Below, there are topics on how to participate in processes of NGOs and social movements related to Rio+20.

How can I contribute to and participate in the official process of negotiations prior to the conference, in the preparatory stages?

The UN regularly opens channels of participation, which include sending case studies, the disclosure of partnerships and activities, and contribution in national processes of preparation for Rio+20, among other things. This information is disclosed by two main channels: the official conference website (www.uncsd2012.org) and through the focal points of the Major Groups of civil society and their contact networks.

The Major Groups started having a more relevant participation during Rio-92, where they played an important role in the creation of Agenda 21. In the terms of the Agenda 21, they are the main groups of society which, inside the UN system, started being considered as partners in the transition towards sustainable development. Since Rio-92, the UN organizes the direct participation of civil society in their official processes through these sectors. There are nine groups, representing: Children and Youth, Farmers, Indigenous Peoples, Local Authorities, NGOs, Scientific and Technological Community, Workers and Trade Unions, Business and Industry, and Women. Obviously, modern societies are much more complex and, sometimes, this classification does not denote the breadth and diversity in each of these segments, nor the existence of others. The group of "farmers", for instance, includes both families and communities involved in family farming and big agribusiness players. The "business and industry" group includes a range of actors that goes from small entrepreneurs to multinational corporations. And the "local authorities" group involves all levels of government interlocutors that are not national government. For more information about the role of Major Groups in the Rio+20 process and contact with focal points, access <http://bit.ly/rio20majorgroups>.

How to make Rio+20 known in my city or municipality?

It is important to see Rio+20 as something that goes far beyond the conference itself or its official preparatory process. Its great value is to stimulate dialogue and joint actions of individuals, social movements and organizations working in various causes, allowing the construction of spaces that also include the many people who feel distant from processes and decisions that define the direction of their lives.

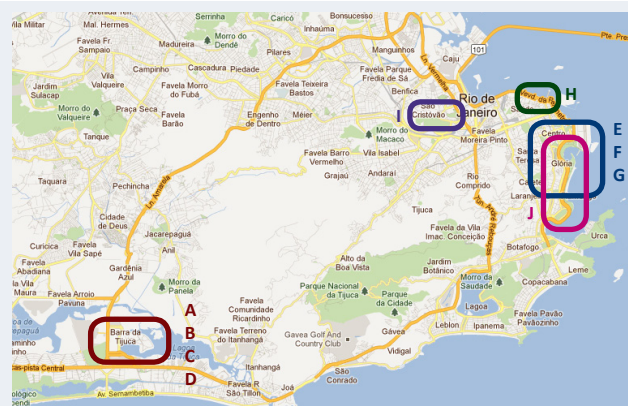
The mobilization for Rio+20 is not limited to the city of Rio de Janeiro or Brazil. The conference will address global issues, and because of that many groups are already being organized in several countries, not only to participate in the official conference proceedings, but also to think about how to use the moment generated by Rio+20 to build regional or local actions that positively affect their communities, cities and states. It is possible to use the momentum created by Rio+20 to initiate processes that can trigger important changes in the short and long term, contributing to the future we want.

One possible way is through the creation of State, Municipal or Local Committees to Rio+20, in order to foster debate about the conference, disseminate information, create connections between individuals, social movements and organizations interested in engaging and drawing plans of action and activities. Another possible way is to promote educational activities and conduct seminars and debates on issues related to Sustainable Development at a regional or local level. There are many possibilities to work with Rio+20 and its issues locally, and this can lead to great results.

How is the geographic distribution of Rio+20 in the city of Rio de Janeiro?

Rio+20 is being presented as the largest conference in the history of the UN, and the government of Rio de Janeiro is preparing several large spaces for activities related to the conference - organized by the UN, governments and civil society. A detailed map can be found in <http://bit.ly/rio20mapa>, and a list of places and a general map is presented below:

- A) Riocentro – Venue for the conference
- B) Parque dos Atletas [Athletes’ Park] – Venue for exhibitions of the UN Member-States and the Brazilian Government
- C) Jacarepaguá Racetrack
- D) Barra Arena
- E) Modern Art Museum (MAM)
- F) Vivo Rio Space
- G) Monument To The Dead Of World War II
- H) Mauá Pier and Galpão da Cidadania [Citizenship Warehouse]
- I) Quinta da Boa Vista
- J) Aterro do Flamengo – Venue for the People’s Summit



How to get to and where to stay in Rio de Janeiro during Rio+20?

Rio de Janeiro is expecting to receive dozens of thousands of visitors for activities around Rio+20, and problems with transportation and accommodation are already expected. The Brazilian Government recommends early booking of air tickets and accommodation for those interested in being present in the city. Accommodation in hotels must be completed by stay home and other alternatives, which shall soon receive online support.

For foreigners, the recommendation is that they consider entering Brazil through another airport, in a nearby city, and then access Rio de Janeiro in a local flight, since complications are foreseen for international flights.

How is the Brazilian Government preparing for Rio+20?

In June 2011, the Brazilian Government has created an Executive Committee and a National Commission for the preparations of Rio+20.

The National Commission, under the responsibility of the Ministries of Environment and Foreign Affairs, is responsible for promoting “the dialog between federal, state, and municipal agencies and civil society in order to articulate the lines of Brazil’s participation in the Rio+20 Conference”. In addition to representatives of 33 Brazilian government agencies (including the legislature and the judiciary and state and municipal levels), this commission counts with the participation of representatives of the following civil society groups: academic community, indigenous peoples, traditional communities, business sectors, workers, NGOs and social movements.



The Executive Committee is responsible for “planning and execution of the measures necessary for the Rio+20 Conference, including the management of resources and contracts related to official events held under the aegis of the United Nations and implementation of activities related to management of material, works, transport, heritage, human resources, budget and finance, communication, protocol, security and conservation of buildings and furniture used”.

The text of the decree creating the Executive Committee and the National Commission for the Rio +20 can be found in <http://bit.ly/rio20decreto>.

Other ministries are also developing activities related to the conference. In addition, the Council of Economic and Social Development (which includes representatives from government and civil society) and the General Secretariat of the Presidency have held dialogues related to the topics under discussion.

What will happen after Rio+20?

In terms of the official process of the conference, the results of Rio+20 shall guide the actions of governments and the UN regarding the issue of sustainable development in the coming years. It is possible to expect that the results will determine the direction to be followed by the multilateral system when dealing with the social, economic and environmental problems we face. Hardly the commitments will be strong enough to generate all the necessary changes, and several of the promises made might not be fulfilled as expected (what explains the skepticism of many when dealing with the UN) but the results of Rio +20 will present a clear vision on what to expect in the coming years, and also generate space for demands and pressure from civil society.

Regarding the role of civil society, Rio+20 emerges as a great moment for articulation and planning activities that should go far beyond the conference. The most diverse groups, working with most different causes, are working together and building initiatives as a result of the process triggered by Rio+20, and civil society should seize this moment to develop activities that go beyond the scope of the official process and also aim at the long term.

After Rio +20, the next big moment in the global debate on sustainable development is likely to be the year of 2015. This is the first deadline established for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and is also the year indicated by the scientific community as when we should reach the peak in carbon emissions if we are to avoid the worst-case scenarios related to climate change. Moreover, as the zero draft of Rio+20 final document presents, important proposals and commitments that will come as a result of the conference – such as the Sustainable Development Goals – have 2015 as an important reference date.

What is the Agenda 21 and how to assess its progress?

It is one of the results of Rio-92 Earth Summit: a comprehensive action plan which should enable the transition to sustainable development, which execution should take place before the twenty-first century. Important and necessary features are: a participatory process involving all actors of society (multi-stakeholder basis) and initiatives in public policy and corporate, community and individual actions, focusing on challenges facing the pursuit of quality of life, environmental sustainability and social justice according to the principles of sustainable societies.

The Agenda 21 adopted at Rio-92 has 40 chapters covering topics such as agriculture, energy, human settlements, education, health, sanitation, and includes an important section on the Major Groups, considered by governments as partners in building sustainable development.

In 1992, the UN General Assembly approved the creation of the CSD - Commission on Sustainable Development (UN Sustainable Development Commissions), to act under the ECOSOC - Economic and Social Council, rather than an institution of higher political-institutional and recommended the Rio-92. The CSD meets annually to discuss issues and developments of the proposals of Agenda 21 and each country provides a regular report on its actions. At Rio +20, the debate on governance may give guidance to new institutional arrangements relevant to make more effective and efficient compliance by countries and agencies and programs of the UN system, multilateral commitment to sustainable development.

REFERENCES

Where can I find more information about Rio+20?

- Official conference website in English: www.uncsd2012.org
- Official conference website in Portuguese: <http://www.rio20.info/>
- Official conference Facebook page in English: www.facebook.com/UNRioplus20
- Official Rio+20 Twitter in English: www.twitter.com/UN_Rioplus20
- UN website for civil society contributions: www.un.org/sustainablefuture
- Brazilian Government and Rio de Janeiro Government website for Rio+20: www.rio20.gov.br
- Ministry of Environment website for Rio+20: <http://hotsite.mma.gov.br/rio20/>
- People's Summit for Environmental and Social Justice website: <http://cupuladospovos.org.br/>
- Video lesson "Understanding Rio+20": <http://bit.ly/rio20videoaula>
- "Radar Rio+20" website and publication: <http://radarrio20.org.br>
- Vitae Civilis Institute website: www.viteacivilis.org.br

DEADLINES AND KEY DATES

2012 February 20 - Deadline for accreditation of institutions interested in participating in Rio+20, for those which do not have consultative status with ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council of the UN) and have not been accredited to the World Summit on Sustainable Development 2002 (WSSD2002). More information: <http://bit.ly/rio20credenciamento>

2012 February 28 - Deadline for registration of "SD-Learning" educational side events to figure in the official program of the conference. More information: <http://bit.ly/rio20sdlearning>

2012 March 19 to 23 - First round of negotiations on the zero draft of the outcome document, in New York

2012 March 26 to 27 - 3rd Intersessional Meeting of Rio+20, in New York

2012 March 30 - Deadline for registration of side events to figure in the official program of the conference during Rio+20. More information: <http://bit.ly/rio20sideevents>

2012 May 20 - Registration deadline for individuals to participate in official events related to the Rio+20 conference in Rio de Janeiro. More information: <http://bit.ly/rio20inscricao>

2012 June 13 to 15 - Realization of the last preparatory meeting for the UN Rio+20, in Rio de Janeiro

2012 June 15 to 23 - Realization of the People's Summit, major civil society event parallel to Rio+20

2012 June 20 to 22 - Realization of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20

The online version of this publication (available at www.viteacivilis.org.br) presents a complete calendar of the official negotiation process and preparatory meetings, from January to May 2012

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